A person is seen from behind, standing on a dirt path that winds through a rocky, hilly landscape. The ground is covered with large, reddish-brown rocks and patches of green grass. The background is shrouded in a thick, white fog, creating a sense of mystery and solitude. The overall tone is soft and contemplative.

Trail Guide to Writing Your Personal Mission Statement

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What is a Personal Mission Statement?

A personal mission statement is a piece of writing that captures what is most important to you in brief statements or paragraphs. It is a tool for enhancing clear thinking when you are trying to evaluate options and make choices in your life.



It is unique to you. No two people's personal mission statements will be identical.

It is not bound by any role you fill during a particular season of life. Whether you are a student or a professional, focused on building a career or a family, your personal mission statement will encompass the core values and priorities that you believe should guide the performance of any role you play.

Having a written personal mission statement is helpful in applying the truths of God in a personal and concrete way, living out the good news of the Bible through the one-of-a-kind personality that God has given you.

Who Should Write a Personal Mission Statement?

Anyone who wants to be efficient and effective in his or her use of time, talent, and energy will benefit from writing a personal mission statement.

Having a personal mission statement on hand for quick reference makes it easier to:

- **say no** to the little things that will actually just waste your time
- **say yes** to the little things that will build discipline and character but do not seem immediately rewarding
- **say no** to the big things that present themselves as reasonable options at first glance but are in fact working toward something that is contrary to your core belief system
- **say yes** to the big things that are not popular options with others but resonate deeply with you on a personal level
- **say no** to the tasks and goals that manipulators, users, and controllers may try to force upon you
- **say yes** to the tasks and goals that God has ordained for you as a powerful outward-working of His grace in your life

Writing a personal mission statement is a great exercise for teens and adults of any age.

Before you are locked into the demands of a particular career path or when you find yourself in a place where your career path needs to change- THAT'S the time to write a personal mission statement. The process you follow in creating the mission statement may help you avoid some of the pitfalls that can come from poor career choices or allowing popular opinion to pull you into decisions you will later regret. A few hours wisely spent now may spare you great frustration and grief down the road.

It is also **never too late** to take a stab at writing a personal mission statement! Even if you have already retired from a career, raised a family and welcomed grandchildren onto your lap, it is still a worthwhile exercise to spend some time in reflection and evaluation about the things that are truly most important to you.

How Do I Write a Personal Mission Statement?

While there are many approaches that may be successful, this article provides a list of steps that are practical and seem to work well for people of many personality types.

Step 1: Time and Space

Carve out a chunk of time for yourself (no less than an hour for sure, and ideally at least two hours). Choose a place where you can think, pray, and write uninterrupted, a space that is a “happy place” for you. Indoors or outdoors – pick a spot that feels safe where you can focus for an hour or two.

Step 2: Tools

Grab yourself a notebook and a pen if you are old-school. Grab your laptop or tablet if you prefer technology for writing, but grab SOMETHING for capturing your thoughts in words for easy reference later. A personal mission statement can’t just be kept in your head; it needs to be written down.



Step 3: Paradigms

A paradigm is a way of looking at things, a perspective that provides the framework in which we see situations, ideas, or people (including ourselves) and evaluate them. It is the lens through which our brains process information.

A simple illustration of the differences in paradigms is to note the way in which a toddler sees bedtime and the way the parent of a toddler sees it.

The toddler's paradigm includes the fun he is having at the moment, his unwillingness to stop playing and go to bed, and his inability to understand that staying up very late at night will make him feel terrible tomorrow morning.

The parent's paradigm includes the knowledge that sleep is necessary for healthy bodies and minds, so the hardship of stopping the playtime and putting on pajamas is really not very important in the grand scheme of things.

Our paradigms are based on many factors including our age and level of experience, our inborn strengths and weaknesses, and our natural preferences and fears. Taking the time to examine and come to a greater understanding of the paradigms through which we view ourselves and others is not something we often do in day-to-day life. Examining paradigms is a helpful step in writing a personal mission statement.



To help you understand your own paradigm, ask yourself these questions and jot down a few notes as you answer. You do not have to use formal language or correct punctuation or even complete sentences! This is not a writing assignment that will be graded; it's an exercise just for YOU.

Note: *This is not an exercise in which there are "right" or "wrong" answers. The world needs all kinds of people, and these questions are not intended to reveal faults in your character; they are simply designed to bring attention to what comes most naturally to your personality.*

1. Do you naturally respond with emotion or analysis first?
2. Do you speak and act quickly or slowly?

3. Do you prefer time with others or time alone when you are happy? When you are sad? When you are confused?
4. Do you dig deeply into one project or interest at a time or find your interest is in many unrelated things at any one time?
5. Do you take situations pretty much at face-value or do you assume that digging deeper is probably necessary?
6. Do you quickly try to determine the right or wrong answer in every situation, or do you see situations and people with an easy, natural awareness of how different they might be from you and how little you might really know about the situation?
7. Do you like to be an observer or the center of attention?
8. Do you gravitate more easily toward family or friends?

The list could go on forever, but these questions will probably get you started recognizing that you (like all other human beings) have a unique-to-you paradigm through which you view and evaluate situations, ideas, and people – yourself included.

There are rich and Godly elements to every paradigm, and there are selfish or warped elements as well; the starting point in this self-examination exercise is the recognition of the fact that YOU HAVE a paradigm, and this is the perspective from which you tend to view things. With that recognition, you can also grasp more clearly than before that EVERYONE HAS a paradigm, and no one else's looks exactly like yours.



Step 4: Two Circles

Counselors and life coaches often use Stephen R. Covey's model of the Circle of Concern and the Circle of Influence to help people understand more about themselves and their potential impact on the world.

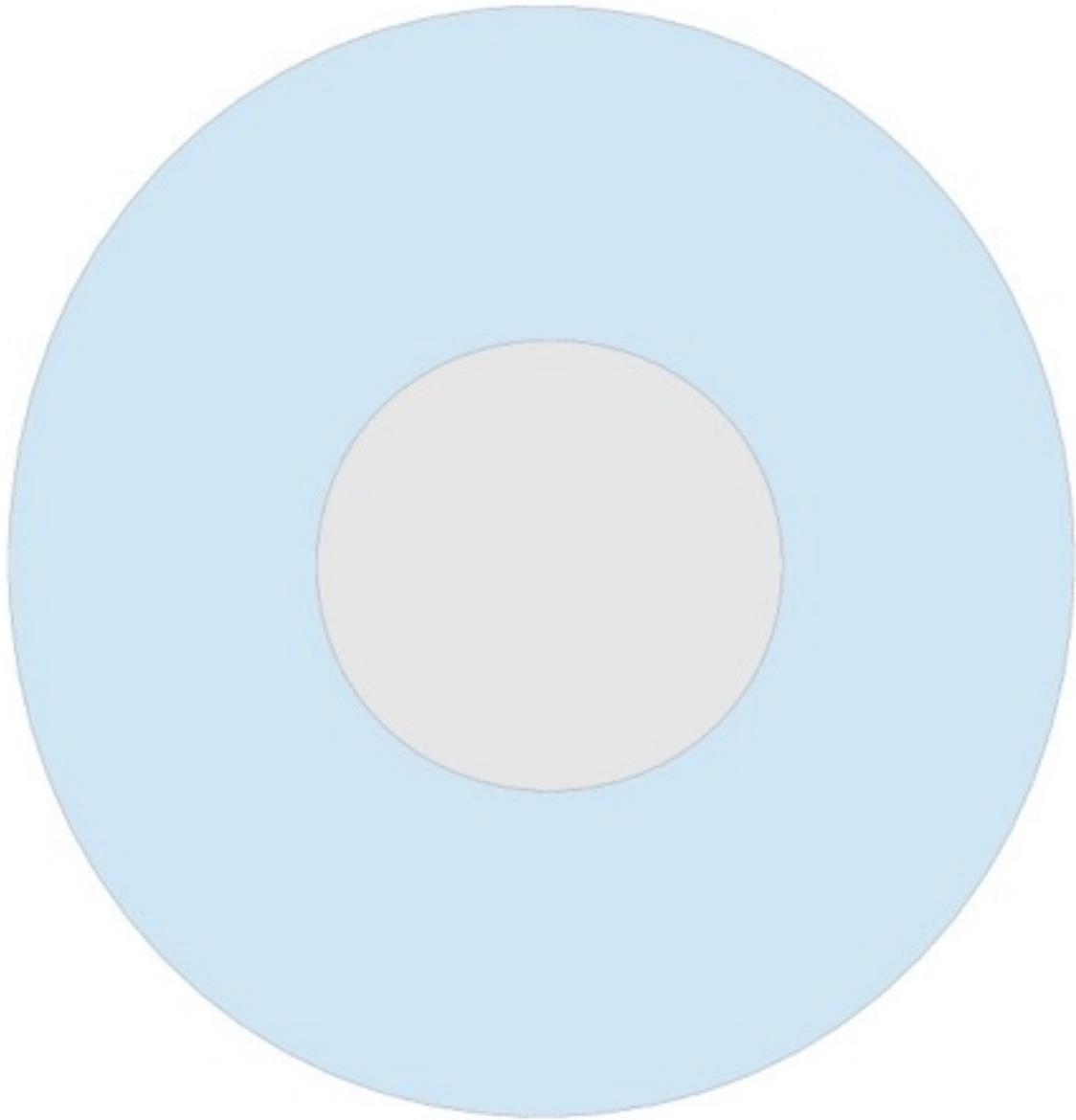
The idea is this – everyone has things about which they are deeply concerned. These things differ somewhat from one person to another. While most folks would agree that children dying of starvation is an issue of concern, some people are much more deeply moved by this than other people who instead, for example, are deeply moved by the plight of children in foster care without a forever family. No one would try to argue that one concern matters and the other does not; most would see both concerns as valid and would understand that certain individuals experience a particular burden for a particular concern.



Using the circles on the next page, note issues that are matters of powerful, ongoing concern in your heart. **Make these notes in the OUTER circle of the diagram.**

Here are some questions to help you:

- What are the causes that move you deeply and always have?
- What seems to matter to you more than it matters to many other people you know?
- What types of tragic news stories tug most fiercely at your emotions?
- What types of stories could you hear again and again?
- What types of success stories make you want to weep or dance with joy?



The outer circle is called THE CIRCLE OF CONCERN. All around us we see things that matter to us, things that we fear and wish to stop, things that we respect and wish to encourage. Our concerns are unique to our personalities, but we can also find others who share those concerns. Some immensely successful work is done by volunteers with similar concerns, working together for positive change in the world.

The items in your Circle of Concern are likely to remain much the same over your lifetime. Some new items may be added as you learn of things you didn't know about in your youth, but the things that deeply concern you are not very likely to just **stop** concerning you over time. If you at age 15 wrote "clean drinking water" as something that concerns you, it is likely that you will still be deeply moved by the news story of a polluted water source in a drought-ridden country when you are 90 years old.

The items in your Circle of Concern can be empowering or they can be paralyzing. We can care so deeply about BIG things that we feel overwhelmed, hopeless, and without recourse in battling for a positive impact. We may worry about these things and feel helpless to make a difference. A helpful tool for managing your Circle of Concern so that it will empower rather than paralyze you is the inner circle, THE CIRCLE OF INFLUENCE.



Using the circle diagram on the previous page, note the places where you often find yourself working successfully – groups of people, roles you play, areas of strength and talent in which you are frequently busy. **Make notes about these groups, roles, or talents in the INNER circle of the diagram.**

Here are some questions to help you:

- Where do you spend more than half of your waking hours?
- Who are the people with whom you have meaningful conversation at least once a week?
- What activity do you undertake that just feels like your "sweet spot"?
- What tasks have earned you praise from people you respect in the past?
- What job title would you give yourself in this season of your life?

The CIRCLE OF INFLUENCE shows us the places where we have power to impact the world right now, in this season of life. It may be in our homes, with our families. It may be in

something you just KNOW goes against the internal workings of the person God made you to be. Stay alert to the paradigm problem!

Using what you learned about your own paradigm, create a one- or two-sentence summary of yourself.

Here are some examples:

- *I am a logical thinker with many varied interests, slow to make decisions, powerfully influenced by my ties to family and not eager to be the center of attention; when sad or anxious, I prefer to be alone to sort through my feelings.*
- *I am a passionate person, always digging deeper in search of more information, quick to speak (sometimes regretting that!) and available 24/7 to my friends. I like to spend a lot of my time with others and prefer to talk through my problems or confusion, but when I decide to pursue a project, I invest in it with 100% of my attention.*

Making notes in your two circles helped you see the things that concern you deeply and the areas of life in which you have immediate potential to make an impact. Seeing how those two circles fit together will continue to help you prevent your concerns from becoming paralyzing. It will also continue to help you make choices that will expand your inner circle of influence to allow you more and more impact on the things that deeply concern you. Throughout different seasons of life, you will find ever-increasing opportunities to have a positive impact on things that truly matter to you.



Using what you learned about your own Circle of Concern and Circle of Influence, create a one- or two-sentence summary of your desire to impact the world in a positive way.

Here are some examples:

- *I care deeply about education and the power that learning gives people of all ages; it is heart-breaking to think of people who are trapped in circumstances where they never even learn to read or write. I want to teach in my everyday life (whether I pursue a career as a professional educator or not), engaging in meaningful conversation with friends and co-workers, volunteering to teach or assisting in Children's Church, honing my writing skills to better communicate information to others.*
- *I am very concerned about people who get "stuck" in financial disasters, dysfunctional relationships, addictions and the like; people should never believe that there are NO options. I want to encourage people to believe for better things and to strategically pursue a better life from the ashes of suffering; whether through volunteer work or fundraising efforts for reputable organizations, personal mentoring and cheerleading for people I know who are fighting an uphill*

battle, or committed prayer for the deliverance of those in bondage, I want to be always looking for ways to help people get unstuck.

Listing your sources of inspiration in the arts, literature, scripture or other people's lives helped you use words (even someone else's words, which is okay!) to capture the essence of what you find to be deeply meaningful.



Using the dominant ideas you observe in your notes from sources of inspiration, create a one- or two-sentence summary of your ideal for life if you could run the universe.

Here are some examples:

- I want non-stop challenge, opportunities for leadership, the chance to swoop into situations that are near the boiling point and bring some straight talk and reason to get things under control...and I want to make people LAUGH even as I do it!
- I want my gravestone to say that people were more peaceful when I was near them, that those who were grieving or confused or exhausted knew that they mattered when I was close by. I want order in my life that allows me to give real one-on-one attention to people, and to know that I have their focus at the same time, so we don't all just rush past one another in a whirlwind.

NOW PUT IT ALL TOGETHER

Those three elements (your paradigm-inspired summary of yourself, your 2-circle-inspired summary of your desire for positive impact, and your inspiration-inspired summary of an ideal life) lay the foundation for a personal mission statement! Let's sum it up into one paragraph!

Sum It Up

Finish these 3 sentences:

I believe

I desire

I commit

Create a paragraph with your 3 sentences. Print it up, or write it attractively on a notecard and post it somewhere private but where you will see it often. Remind yourself regularly of your ideal focus.

This is your personal mission statement!

What Do I Do After I've Finished These Steps?

A personal mission statement is the kind of exercise that can be revisited, tweaked, added-to, and otherwise refined over a whole lifetime. If you feel like this article required quite enough self-examination for now, that's okay! Put your personal mission statement away somewhere safe where you can look at it again in weeks or months or a year. Perhaps make reading it and thinking about it a part of your birthday celebration each year, or take a look at it as you begin each new year on January 1st.



If, instead, you feel like this exercise just got you started and you want MORE, that's okay, too. Try some of the suggested follow-up exercises or seek out materials from the reference list on the last page of this article and see what else you can discover!

Follow-Up Exercises

Ponder

1. What is MY life all about – not just “life” in general, but the life God gave me?
2. What do I truly stand for (searching for specifics beyond the vague and safe answers, like “Jesus”)?
3. What am I doing about it? What are regular activities in which I am engaged that are moving my life forward in the direction of making a positive impact in the ways that I genuinely believe are consistent with God’s unique plan for me?

BONUS 4th Question:

4. What concrete, measurable, realistic goal can I set for the next year of my life that will move me further in using my time, energy, and talent for things that matter deeply to me?

Be a Poet

Create an acrostic poem with the letters of your name running down the left margin of the page. For each letter of your name, write a word or phrase that captures parts of your personality, your concerns, your talents, your struggles, your longings, your delights, etc.

Envision Life

Create a vision board (either real poster board or cork board, or use a virtual format like Pinterest online) and use pictures, words, tangible items, colors, textures, and all things visual to illustrate your personal mission and ways that you would love to see it realized.



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